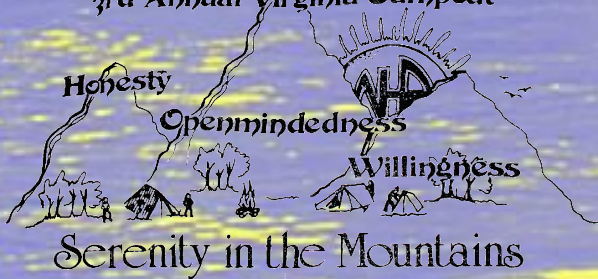


A Gathering of the Tribes: The BRANA Campout




BRANA-III 1984

3rd Annual Virginia Campout



The Heart of NA Beats





A Gathering of the Tribes: The BRANA Campout
Copyright © 2008 BRANA Campout Inc.
Narcotics Anonymous logos and text represented in BRANA
Campout artwork are registered trademarks and copyrighted
material of NA World Services Inc. and are used in accor-
dance with NA Intellectual Property Bulletin #1.

BRANA Campout Inc.
P.O. Box 623
Harrisonburg, VA 22803

www.brana.org
campout@brana.org

A Gathering of the Tribes

Kermit O. was nine months clean at the first BRANA Campout in 1982. More than two decades later, he called it “a gathering of the tribes.”

“You see the Virginia Beach tribe, the Richmond tribe, the Winchester tribe, the Lynchburg tribe,” Kermit said. “There’s great fellowship here and everyone welcomes you.”

Kermit was one of the featured speakers at BRANA I and has been a regular at the campout since then.

“It’s peaceful,” he added. “It’s serenity in the woods.”

A few recreational vehicles and pop-up trailers dot the campground, but most of the campers are in tents, which puts everyone in close quarters with the thinnest of walls.

It’s a throwback to the old tribes that wandered the country, living together, said George E., of North Oxford, Mass.

“You can go to a convention and there can be 500 people, yet you can walk through the hotel lobby and not see anybody in NA, they’re all behind closed doors,” George said. “People can go up in their rooms, get room service, they don’t even have to come out to go to the bathroom.”

At a campout, a trip from your tent to the restrooms will result in hugs.

“We all get together, eat together, sleep right next to each other,” George added. “And if you think no one can hear what’s going on in your tent - we know!”

The Saturday night speaker at the 25th annual BRANA Campout in July 2006, George summed up the essence of the event.

“You get a spiritual high,” he said. “All that energy that’s here - we leave with that.”



Sunday morning at BRANA 23

THREE DAYS OF FELLOWSHIP, MEETINGS AND THE MIRACLE

Hosted by Blue Ridge Area Narcotics Anonymous, the BRANA Campout began when NA was just gaining a foothold in the western part of Virginia. The campout has grown along with the area and has established a reputation as one of the premier recovery events in the state.

“Even if I don’t make anything else, I’m coming to BRANA. I feel really centered here and I feel close to God.” Christine O., Chesapeake, Va.

“It’s an opportunity to meet people. And there’s something that brings God into the equation.” Michael M., Milton, Del.

“It will let you know that you can have fun in recovery, take time to lay on the rocks in the river and thank NA and your higher power. It definitely is a God thing.” Kelley D., Roanoke, Va.

Campers from Virginia and an increasing number from out-of-state have found the BRANA Campout to be an event where they can renew their spirituality, continue the healing process through NA and make new friends in recovery.

For some, it is their first clean experience in a wooded setting. For others, the campout has become an annual event. Invariably it rains, leaving people with matted hair and muddy feet.

And when the Blue Ridge Area nearly imploded with controversy, the Region of the Virginians, now the Central Atlantic Region, stepped in and would not let the BRANA Campout go away.



Early Bird Meeting at BRANA 25



Twenty-Five Years – Just For Today

“We named it after the area, called it the BRANA Roundup and set the dates for late July 1982. It turned out to be the first statewide NA function in Virginia.” Kermit O., Charlottesville, Va.

BEGINNINGS

Narcotics Anonymous meetings were forming in Central and Western Virginia in the early 1980s. At that time, the Blue Ridge Area included most of the state west of Richmond and had about eight meetings scattered between Charlottesville, Winchester, Roanoke, Harrisonburg, Staunton and Waynesboro.

The late Larry North helped start a number of meetings in the area. North was a driving force behind NA in Virginia and Maryland and his impact was profound. "When most of us had a day clean, he had nine years," Kermit said. "North was a tireless 12-step person. Wherever NA was happening, he was there."

North helped Judith C., who now lives in Norfolk, Va., start a meeting in Waynesboro in October 1981. She started another in Harrisonburg a month later.

"It was difficult to keep two meetings going by myself in two different cities," Judith said.

"Especially when I had to sit many nights at meetings by myself or at times with only one other person."



About 125 recovering addicts attended BRANA One, a good turnout considering the size of NA at that time.

At BRANA 26, held in July 2007, attendance had increased to 290.

The second BRANA Campout was held at Natural Chimneys Regional Park near Mount Solon in the Shenandoah Valley.



"I probably go to seven campouts and conventions a year. BRANA has always been a great experience." Joe B., Virginia Beach, Va.

"I do about four or five campouts every summer and a lot of people consider this one the best. It's a really good experience for newcomers. It's a way of connecting." Rhett C., Richmond, Va.

"I've been here for the past 10 years. This is probably one of the better campouts in NA." Ken J., Richmond, Va.

BRANA ONE

The first BRANA Campout was held at the home of Michael S., who lived near Free Union, west of Charlottesville, according to Kermit.

“Larry North said ‘why don’t we have an NA roundup, a campout,’” Kermit said. They mowed several acres behind Michael’s house, rented some portable toilets and set out railroad ties for camp fires. North offered to make flyers, but Kermit doesn’t recall seeing one, so news of the event spread by word of mouth.

“We opened up on Friday night,” Kermit said. “And people started showing up from everywhere. This guy honked his horn and said ‘my name’s Tuffy and I’m from Ohio.’”

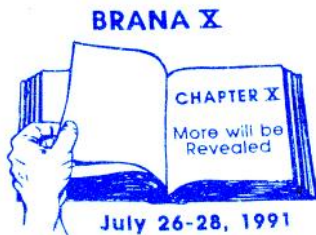


Judith, who has attended every campout since 1982, recalls BRANA One: “The thing that impressed me so much at that first campout was all the people that I met from all over. There were people from Maryland, New Jersey, Florida and other places that I met that weekend.”

“I love the clean-time countdown, when we all get in a circle and you see how many people are really here.” Becky P., Raphine, Va.

“This is one of the best parts of NA. It teaches the newcomers and everybody else that you can have fun and stay clean.” Steve A., Staunton

“This is the first campout I woke up and remembered where I was.” James H., Waynesboro, Va.



DIVISIONS, CONTROVERSY & BRANA CAMPOUT INC.

In 1984, the Charlottesville groups hosted BRANA III at Montpelier Campgrounds. It was organized by Kermit and North, who put it together in about three weeks just before the event.

“The last night of BRANA III, we held the first area service committee meeting for the Piedmont Area of NA,” Kermit said. “This was when we left BRANA. They kept the name and the campout, which was okay.”

From 1985 to the present, BRANA has held its annual campout at Natural Chimneys and over the years attendance has averaged around 200. While Natural Chimneys is a bit tricky

to find, it is considered an ideal site. Most of the campers are away from the general population, in the J-Loop at the northwest end of the campground. A covered pavilion provides shelter for the meetings and the rock formations from which the park takes its name loom above while the forested area lends a sense of serenity to the setting.

The early campouts were “pretty crazy, some social skills were lack-

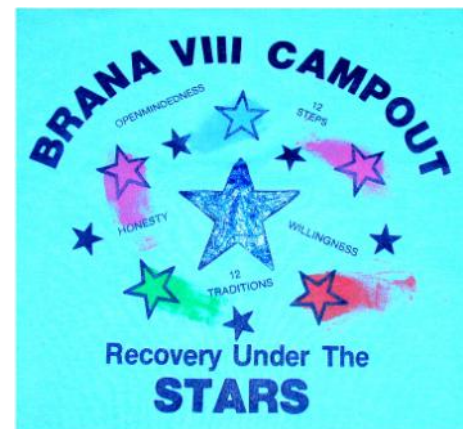
ing,” according to the late Richard Soden. But the campouts also provided a nurturing environment for recovery.

“I was a loner, a back-row kind of guy and you had to drag me to it,” Soden said. “But the campout forced me to socialize and get along, develop some social skills.”

“There’s 211 people here. And me and Richard (Soden) are the oldest. We’re over 50. So there is some indication that dope fiends don’t live long. You look around your group and you see how many people you find my age - my and Richard’s age - not a whole lot around.” The late Jim Hearn, featured speaker at BRANA 6 in 1987.

“Meeting all the people is great - the diversity of people - young and old. It helps me in my growth and strengthens my recovery. It makes me believe that anything is possible.” Jill H., Harrisonburg, Va.

“That many people clean was an amazing sight. Even though some of us are shy, you feel a bond with other people there. It makes you realize that you’re not alone.” Kathy S., Texas.



As BRANA 13 approached in 1994, the Blue Ridge Area was virtually non-existent, according to Jason B., of Harrisonburg. People had moved away or gotten resentments and participation had all but disappeared.

In March of that year, Jason went to a regional service meeting in Winchester, Va. People asked about the BRANA Campout because no one had seen a flyer and word of the area's problems had gotten out.

"I was elected special events chair and we hosted a regional at the BRANA Campout," Jason said. "People from different areas worked on flyers and donated time to help organize." And they kept the campout going, he added. All the campout's bills were paid, some money was donated to the Region of the Virginians and enough money was set aside for the next campout.



Jason served as campout chairman for more than a decade. "It's not that big a deal to organize and get together," Jason said.

"And it's turned out really well. We give the campground a lot of money and have enough to do it all again next year."

The BRANA Campout is fully self-supporting and does not rely on fundraisers.

In 2005, the campout was granted a charter from the State Corporation Commission to operate as a non-stock corporation under Chapter 10, Title 13.1 of the Code of Virginia.

"This is my first ever campout. There's nothing in the dictionary I'm aware of that can describe the unity, the camaraderie, the fellowship, the miracle." Robert W., Charlottesville, Va.

"I would recommend it to anyone that wants healing and recovery. I returned home a different person. Thank God." Joan L., Fredericksburg, Va.

"I liked the 7 [a.m.] meetings best. It started my day with a renewed sense of spirituality and stronger feeling of unity with everyone at the campout." Jean W., Weyers Cave, Va.



In July 2007, 290 campers, representing 1540 years of clean time, attended the 26th annual BRANA Campout.

SPIRITUAL CONNECTION

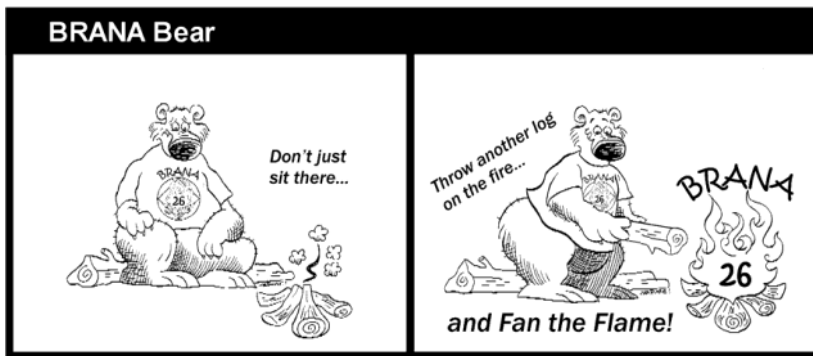
The campout can have a profound impact on recovery, especially for newcomers.

"The campout was where I first admitted that I was an addict," said Raymond L., formerly of Harrisonburg. Raymond got clean in 1984 and served on the campout committee in early recovery. "My first clean-time countdown was the most amazing thing. I still look forward to that."

All of the campout's organized activities are recovery oriented and the campout has gained a reputation for quality recovery, according to Scott B. of Dulles, who got clean in 1986.

"This is a mainstay campout - a lot of people and a lot of clean time - it has some deep spiritual connection for me," Scott said. "I love bringing newcomers. I brought someone up here that the thought of camping gives him nightmares and he's here because I said 'this is a good thing.'"

For some newcomers, the BRANA Campout offered the first signs of life and proof that people



can have a great time and not use drugs.

Mike A., of Staunton, was two-days clean at BRANA 23. "My boss, who's in NA, offered to bring me to the campout," Mike said. "It's good to get out here and not use."

The campout has its own way of bringing people together. Marie P. and Michael M. were traveling cross-country and saw BRANA 23 listed on the Free State Region's Web site.

"It's an opportunity to fellowship in a way that's impossible even at a convention," Michael said. "And this is a nice spot. You're away from the general population, which is always ideal when you get this many addicts in one place."

A large contingent of recovering addicts in the Tidewater area of Virginia has found the BRANA Campout to be a sort of annual reunion, said Joe B. of Virginia Beach. The trip from the beach to Natural Chimneys is about five hours; some campers arrive a day before the campout begins and stay an additional day, he added.

"A lot of us don't see one another except at BRANA and the state convention," Joe said. "So it's a matter of getting together at BRANA to fellowship with people we don't see in our own backyard."

BRANA 25 featured an event that was not on the campout schedule, as two recovering addicts from Staunton exchanged wedding vows. Cindy H. and Rick G. were married on Saturday afternoon between the workshops and evening speaker meeting. As far as anyone involved with BRANA can remember, it was the campout's first wedding.

STRONG NA MESSAGE

Speakers are the focus of four of the campout's seven meetings, on Friday and Saturday nights and Saturday and Sunday mornings.

Billy F., of Mount Solon, Va., recalled the impact of a meeting at his first campout in 1995. Billy was "coming off a little run" at the time and was doubtful that people could get together and have fun without using drugs. He heard Philip C. of Charlottesville at one of the meetings. "He talked about the program and didn't talk about drugs," Billy said. "It's spiritual for me."

Speakers have a responsibility to carry a strong NA message, according to Marie P., from Milton, Del., the Saturday morning speaker at BRANA 23. "I've based my whole recovery on saying what comes to my mind, but I know I'm going to talk about the steps," she said. "That's what kept me clean."

Kim E., of Richmond, another speaker at BRANA 23, sought help from her sponsor. "My sponsor always tells me to pray and ask for God's message and not my mess," Kim said. "I ran into a couple of people that prayed with me before I spoke."



"I heard so many good things about it from people who've been coming here for years." Kira I., Virginia Beach, Va.

"This is my first time at BRANA [2004], but I've known about it since 1985. Beautiful." John A., Manassas, Va.

"Next year, we'll have to get here on Thursday." Marie P., Milton, Del.

A gathering place to renew friendships, introduce newcomers to the camping/recovery experience and spread the word of life without drugs in Narcotics Anonymous, the campout contributes to a feeling of unity. It's a sense of belonging, that everyone is welcome, said Jennifer S., of St. Petersburg, Fla. Jennifer began her recovery in Virginia and looks forward to an annual return visit.



"I always like to turn people on to BRANA," she said. "It's a big deal, so I always bring somebody different with me every year."

The attraction of the campout is the atmosphere of recovery, according to Gina F., of Baltimore, Md. She learned of the BRANA Campout at the New Dominion Area's annual campout. "The exact words I remember were 'if you like this one you have to go to BRANA,'" Gina said. "It's the NA Woodstock."

